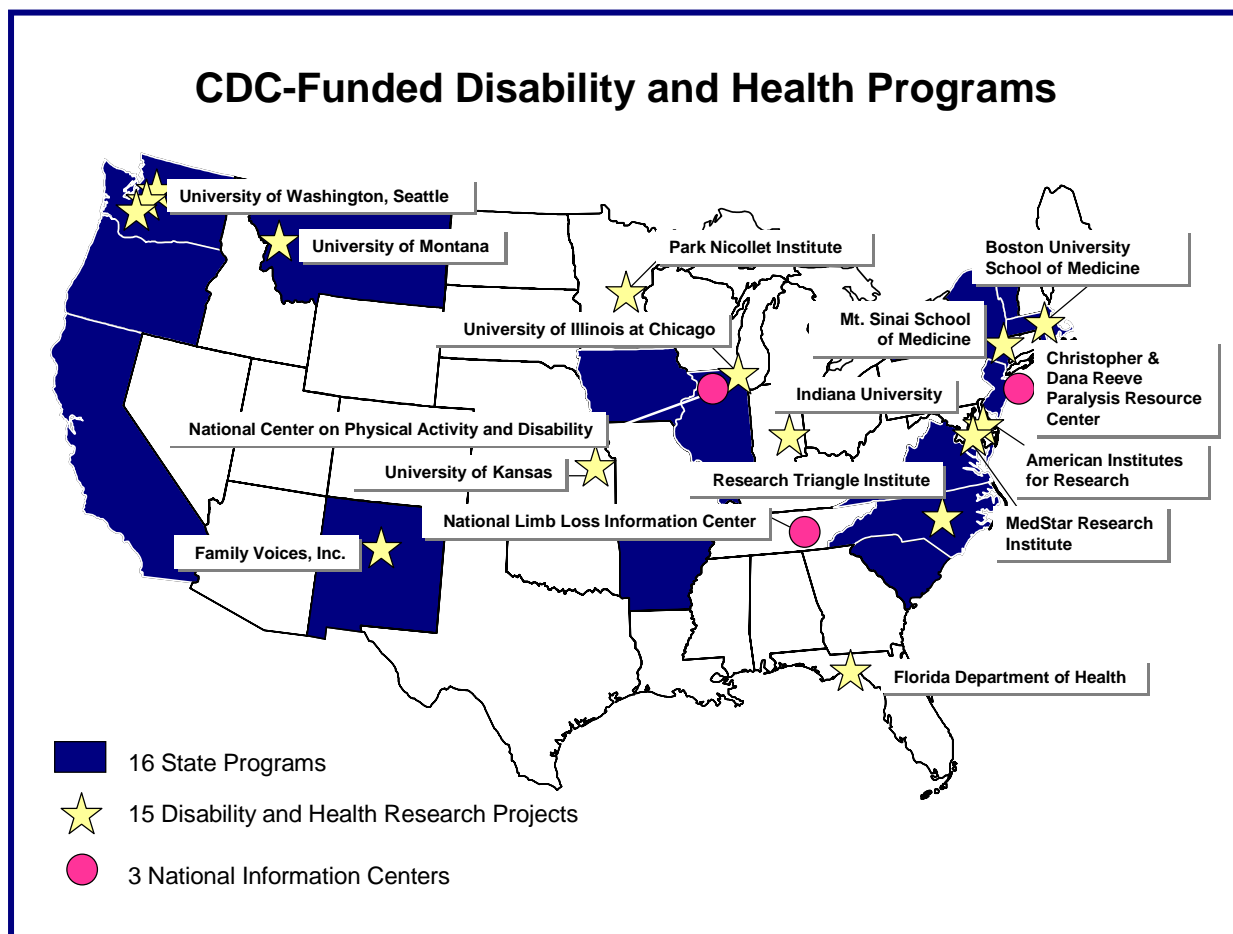


Disability and Health:

Promoting the Health and Well-Being of People with Disabilities, 2004



“Old misconceptions about physical and mental disability are being discredited. Old barriers are falling away. But, that’s not enough. We must speed up the day when the last barrier has been removed.”

*George W. Bush
43rd President of the United States*

Disabilities and Health

Why are Disabilities a Public Health Problem?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are nearly 50 million Americans with some type of disability, including long-term physical disability, such as those associated with spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, or spina bifida; sensory disabilities such as hearing loss and visual impairment; and cognitive conditions like intellectual disability. People with disabilities come from every ethnic background and socioeconomic status.

Much remains unknown about the causes, impacts and health outcomes associated with many disabilities. Within federal programs, there are over fifty definitions of disability — making it difficult to determine the types and severities of disabilities in America.

While different programs exist for improving the health and well-being of individuals with disabilities, many people with disabilities do not know about these programs or how to access them.

Lack of Access

Although there are public policies in place to safeguard the educational and occupational rights of

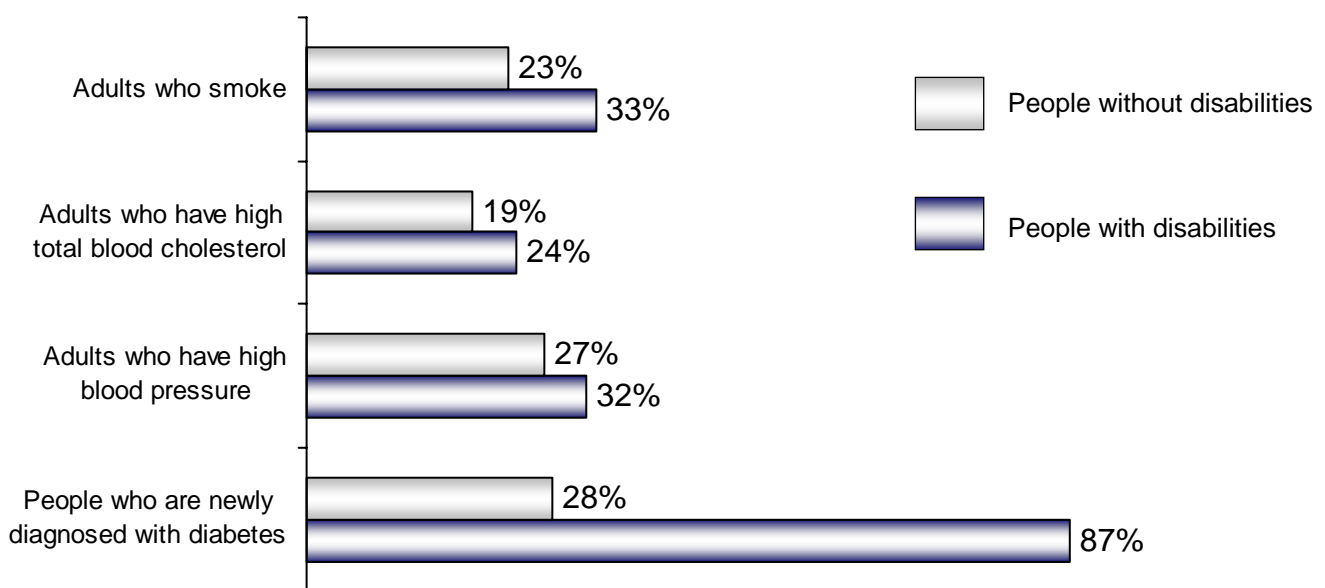
people with disabilities, individuals with disabilities face limited access to the range of activities, programs, and services that promote healthy living. A lack of access to preventive health services may keep people with disabilities from living full, healthy, and productive lives.

Research shows that people with disabilities often have more problems accessing social and recreational activities, employment, and health care than people without disabilities. Recent data suggest that more Americans with disabilities smoke and have high blood pressure and high cholesterol than do people without disabilities.

Secondary Conditions Among People with Disabilities

Often, people with disabilities become more susceptible to other health problems as a result of their disabling, or *primary*, condition. Additional health problems that are directly related to, or that are exacerbated by, a primary condition are referred to as *secondary conditions*. Secondary conditions that people with disabilities often face include pain, fatigue, obesity, isolation, and depression. Because secondary conditions among people with disabilities can be experienced across the life span, reducing them is a public health priority.

Health Gaps Among People with Disabilities



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010 2nd ed. With understanding and improving health and objectives for improving health.* 2 vols. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office; November 2000.

CDC's Leadership in Disability and Health

What are CDC and its Partners Doing About Disability and Health, Secondary Conditions?

The National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD) works to promote the health, well-being, independence, productivity, and full societal participation of people with disabilities; and reduce the incidence and severity of secondary conditions. Housed in this center, CDC's Disability and Health activities include assessment, monitoring, prevention of secondary conditions, health promotion, training for health professionals, and information dissemination.

People with disabilities need access to well-researched information about their conditions and care options such as that produced by NCBDDD. CDC is working to include people with disabilities in all preventive health and health promotion efforts, as well as in policy planning. CDC is also focusing on changing the environmental factors that undermine health and well-being, such as making recreational and medical facilities more available and accessible.

With \$13.1 million appropriated by Congress for fiscal year 2004, CDC is working with state and partner organizations to address the health of people with disabilities. CDC and its partners will also be moving toward achieving its 13 disability-related objectives in *Healthy People 2010*, the nation's agenda for promoting health and preventing disease. Also, CDC collects and analyzes data on people with disabilities to identify health disparities relative to the population without disabilities.



1. CDC funds university- and hospital-based research on risk factors and measures of health, functioning, and disability

A diverse group of 15 studies covers many important disability research interests. CDC programs work by:

- Examining levels of social participation, health status, and secondary conditions among people with disabilities.
- Evaluating the use of clinical preventive services and public programs by people with disabilities.

Spotlight: 3 Programs in Illinois

Illinois hosts three innovative programs designed to promote the health and well-being of people with disabilities.



- **Illinois' state-based initiative** focuses on developing a statewide monitoring system to track the health status of adults with developmental disabilities. Focusing on developmental disabilities, the system gathers information on functional limitations and functional status, secondary conditions, quality of life among persons with disabilities and their families, and state specific data to support program development and evaluation. These surveillance data will help guide future health promotion initiatives that address overweight/obesity, low physical fitness, and poor nutrition in persons with developmental disabilities.

- **Researchers at the University of Illinois–Chicago** are working to evaluate the effectiveness of increasing physical activity among overweight individuals with mobility limitations through a physician-referred program that connects participants to the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability. People with mobility limitations have a higher level of physical inactivity because of personal and environmental barriers to such activity. Regular sustainable physical activity can have a dramatic effect on reducing obesity and other secondary conditions and increasing quality of life.

- **The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability's** motto is “exercise for *every* body.” This resource center has practical information, such as tips, guidelines, fact sheets, games and sports that have been adapted for people with disabilities, as well as simple, low-cost or free suggestions for becoming more fit. NCPAD also supports research on making community exercise facilities more accessible to all people. For more information about NCPAD, visit their website at <http://www.ncpad.org>.

- Developing and evaluating cost-effective community-based public health interventions.
- Developing and implementing disability awareness curricula and training for public health professionals.

2. CDC funds state disability and health programs for collection, health promotion interventions, and information dissemination

These programs are designed to strengthen a state's infrastructure and to build collaborations that address environmental and lifestyle issues affecting the health and well-being of people with disabilities. These programs also assess the magnitude of disability in state populations. And, CDC disability and health efforts assist in the development of state-based health promotion programs designed to reach people with disabilities as well as health professionals, or facilities that promote community health.

3. CDC funds three National Information Centers on disability

CDC supports the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability, the National Limb Loss Information Center, and the Christopher and Dana Reeve Paralysis Resource Center. These centers provide comprehensive information and resource materials to people with disabilities, and their families, caregivers, and healthcare providers.

Living Well With a Disability

This health promotion and wellness program for people who experience a variety of disabilities focuses on setting health related goals. Participants develop long-term personal health goals that have the potential to improve quality of life and they learn to improve healthy behaviors. *Living Well With a Disability* offers strategies for increasing exercise, healthier eating, and understanding medical care. Participants have reported better health, more productive doctor's visits, and fewer trips to the emergency room. *Living Well with a Disability* has been implemented in 17 states. Recent cost benefit analyses have demonstrated a range of cost savings from \$81,000 to \$240,000.

4. CDC provides leadership for the development and implementation of public health practices

CDC provides conference grants to facilitate the exchange of timely information about the health and well-being of people with disabilities, establish research and policy priorities, and plan for program implementation such as the *Living Well With a Disability* curriculum.

CDC also collaborates with groups like the Special Olympics to address the health challenges and disparities faced by individuals with disabilities. Through the *Healthy Athletes* program, CDC supports local, national and international efforts to provide health screenings to athletes with intellectual disabilities.

Future Directions

To continue to advance its efforts to improve the health of people with disabilities and reduce the occurrence and impact of secondary conditions, CDC is supporting research to determine how best to implement health promotion programs that ensure that programs, services, and health communication messages are accessible to all people with disabilities. CDC will continue to promote the health and well-being of individuals with disabilities by improving the overall quality of life of people living

with spina bifida, limb loss, and paralysis; providing state programs with ongoing technical assistance and training; and expanding the number of states, territories, and tribes funded for these programs. CDC also hopes to develop a public health action plan to identify issues related to the health of people with disabilities and public health strategies that will be inclusive of and provide support for people with disabilities across the life span.

For more information about Disabilities and Health or the projects and programs described here, contact
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